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ABSTRACT

When a program for gifted children in Massillon, Ohio, was being developed, the planning team built into the program proposal a provision for staff development for classroom teachers. The goal of this training of third through sixth grade classroom teachers was to facilitate the bridging experience for the identified gifted students and to provide enrichment experiences for students who were not in the gifted program. Five graduate credit hours were provided to teachers who participated in a three-credit hour course from a local college and two credits were given for support group participation. Major program goals included: identification and use of various academic accommodations and adaptations for gifted students; adaptation of existing curricula to meet the needs of gifted students; and development of a personal and professional philosophy that includes the concept of teacher responsibility for providing appropriate opportunities for gifted students. The program was specifically developed according to known needs for effective teacher development, including use of practical ideas, regular feedback, problem-centered staff development, and continual support and follow-up. (CB)

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THE GIFTED CHILD IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM: INSERVICE PROGRAM FOR THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

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In recent years, much attention has been given to the need for upgrading the skills of experienced teachers. The literature is replete with guidelines and research on inservice and staff development in the regular educational program. However, this is not the case in gifted education. Most inservice that takes place for teachers in gifted education programs is to develop skills in specific processes or for certification in the area of gifted education. Inservice for the regular classroom teacher is almost non-existent, even though the most popular delivery methods for gifted education at the elementary level are pull-out/resource room and cluster grouping models, both of which involve the regular classroom teacher. Leaders in the field agree that gifted program specialists should be involved in providing staff development to all teachers, yet little is being done to advance this concept. Where gifted education inservice is provided for regular classroom teachers, it is usually a one-time presentation on characteristics and identification of gifted students, or intermittent activities presented at faculty meetings several times per year, with little or no formal follow-up or support for teachers.

When the T.I.G.E.R. program for gifted children in Massillon, Ohio was being developed, the Elementary Planning Team built into its program proposal a provision for staff development for classroom teachers. The "cluster teacher" component (named for the cluster grouping of identified gifted students in their classrooms) involved the training of classroom teachers in grades 3-6, as well as provisions for materials and support by the program coordinator. The goal of this training is to facilitate the bridging experience for the identified gifted students and to provide enrichment experiences for

students who were not in the gifted program. Bridging lessons are designed to act as a link between the resource room and the regular classroom.

The members of the Board of Education and the central administrative staff were made aware of the financial and legal implications of this proposal (i.e., interpretation of teachers' contract) prior to their acceptance of the program design. By including a staff development component for regular classroom teachers, the Board of Education adopted an innovative concept in gifted education in northeast Ohio. Specifically, the Board of Education agreed to provide up to five graduate credit hours for teachers who participated in the staff development program and classroom component as a cluster teacher. This was translated into a three credit hour course from a local college ("Teaching Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom") and two credits for support group participation. These credits are paid for by the Board of Education. It was decided to provide course credit rather than per diem reimbursement for several reasons: some teachers had taken inservice classes in the past just for the money and did not use the techniques in the classroom; the designers felt that people would be more inclined to try techniques and attend sessions if they were receiving credit for it; and the designers felt that it would provide incentive to complete additional graduate work (10 credit hours are needed for a lateral move on the pay scale).

Teacher commitment includes certain requirements. Teachers are required to take the course being offered, which is taught by the gifted program coordinator and tailored to the needs of Massillon teachers and students; and teachers are required to work in the

support group with others at their grade level. Volunteers were requested, requirements were explained at informational meetings, and plans for implementation began.

There are several goals of this staff development program. The major goals include:

1) the identification and use of a variety of academic accommodations and adaptations for gifted students;

2) the adaptation of the existing curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students, using appropriate instructional techniques and strategies to enhance thinking;

3) the development of a personal and professional philosophy that includes the concept of teacher responsibility for providing appropriate opportunities for gifted students commensurate with their abilities.

These goals have been developed to encourage involvement on the part of the teachers and commitment to the further development of the gifted program.

PROCEDURE

Keeping in mind the total educational program of the school district, and using the findings from research, the staff development program for classroom teachers was planned to expand the teachers' repertoire of strategies and techniques over the long term, and to provide them with ideas and materials that are readily usable in their classrooms. Twenty-four teachers in grades 3-6 met for two full days of workshops in September. These were designed as awareness and to heighten motivation to try new ideas, techniques and materials in the classroom. These teachers have continued to meet one day each week

after school for two and one-half hours to complete the requirements for the course work. In addition, they meet individually with the gifted program coordinator to discuss student needs in the classroom as well as their own needs related to program implementation. These meetings take the form of mini-inservice or "tutoring" sessions.

Guskey (1986) has developed a model of the process of teacher change. He proposes that staff development results first in a change in teachers' classroom practices, then in a change in student learning outcomes, and finally in a change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes (p.7). This concept, coupled with what we know about the adult learner, guided the development of this staff development program.

IMPLICATIONS

1) Teachers must be provided with practical ideas that can be put into place immediately in the classroom.

During each class session, a new technique, strategy or idea is introduced. Ideas are presented which demonstrate the use of the strategy or idea at each grade level. The strategy is modeled by the instructor, and participants practice the strategy in small peer groups. Materials for using the strategy in the classroom are given to the participants. At the next session, feelings, adaptations, successes and failures are discussed and suggestions offered by participants.

2) Teachers must feel ownership in their own learning.

By incorporating suggestions from teachers about the content of each session, they see that: (a) their needs and ideas are important; (b) their needs are being met; (c) individualization can take place with adults as well as with children.

3) Teachers must receive regular feedback on student progress.

Teachers working at the same grade level provide feedback to each other on what they see that is working or not working. The gifted program coordinator also provides individualized feedback to teachers on the progress of the students in the resource room component of the program. Bridging lessons are planned together to facilitate the continuity of the child's program and continued progress.

4) Teachers bring widely diverse experiences, which must be recognized, to the staff development program.

Because of this variety of experiences in the classroom, teachers are encouraged to share their ideas about what works (and why) and what doesn't work (and why). They help each other clarify the use of learning activities and provide suggestions to both fellow teachers and the instructor. They also come to see that many of the practices that they have used over the years are perfectly valid to use in this situation. Thus, many of the teachers gain in self-confidence and are more willing to attempt "gifted program strategies" and to expand their repertoire of teaching techniques.

5) Teachers are problem-centered in their orientation to staff development.

Coupled with the need for practical, ready-to-use ideas, this orientation indicates a real need on the part of teachers. They want to see the techiques being used and try them out before using them with children. This is one reason for the modeling of the technique and small group practice. Another need that teachers perceive is time management techniques, both for themselves and for their students. This topic was the focus of one session, and it is integrated into each session as techniques are introduced.

6) Continual support and follow-up must be provided.

This is one of the most critical components of any staff development program. Teachers need to have direction and guidance after the sessions if their involvement is to be maintained. They also need to know that assistance is readily available to them without the stigma of failure. There will be occasional failures, so teachers need to have support to persist in their efforts. In this program, support is provided in two ways: (1) the coordinator meets regularly with individual teachers to provide ideas and "a pat on the back," to observe them in class and provide feedback, and to provide demonstration teaching if requested; (2) small support groups at each grade level meet monthly to evaluate strategies and materials and to create materials with support from others. Additional materials are provided by the gifted program coordinator for use in specific content units. These have been designed to utilize the processes and strategies discussed in the staff development sessions.

7) The process of change is slow and often difficult.

A great deal of time and effort is needed during the change process. The Board of Education has helped to facilitate the change process by providing some time and monetary support to this program. However, teachers still must expend extra time and effort to attend staff development sessions and to attempt to change their own teaching behaviors. Teachers must be eased into a new program with training, support and time. This program has been designed to provide for all of these needs.

BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED

Outcomes of this staff development program should transcend the boundaries of gifted education and enhance the learning of all students. By providing teachers with training in gifted education and in strategies to expand their own teaching repertoire, positive ripple effects can be expected to permeate the entire school system. Teachers can begin to move beyond the awareness level toward change that can truly bridge the gap between the gifted program and the regular classroom program. Dettmer (1986a) says: "A comprehensive 'umbrella' of gifted education inservice and staff development would be a natural tool for initiating an overarching climate of educational progress to more effectively nurture all student potential" (p.101). Since Massillon is in the infancy of providing comprehensive staff development for implementation of new programs, our gifted program staff development model seems to be this "umbrella" or vehicle for the beginning of change.

IS IT WORKING?

Initial indications show that the beginnings of change are taking place. Those teachers who have been attending the sessions have indicated that they have tried new ideas and strategies or techniques, have used bridging materials with most of their students, and have "gone beyond" the text to provide meaningful learning experiences that are conceptually, rather than factually, based. Teachers have requested materials for use in their classes at an increasing rate. They also indicate the awareness of the integration of thinking skills into their lessons, as well as an awareness of the presence or absence of such in texts. Through the efforts of dedicated teachers who wish

to grow professionally, and through the philosophical and financial support of the Board of Education and the central administration, all of the children of Masillon are on their way to an ever stronger educational program.

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